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'Year of the spy' — more were caught, but security is still lax

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Washington

The nabbing of yet another accused spy highlights what has been a banner year for spies — and spy-catching — in the United States.

The weekend arrest and arraignment Monday of Randy Miles Jeffries underscores the competent field work that has generally typified the role of the FBI in interdicting spies attempting to pass US secrets to the Soviet Union.

But this year's batch of spy cases has also focused new attention on the lax security procedures and understaffed government policing agencies that continue to make episodes like the Jeffries case possible.

Mr. Jeffries, a messenger for a private Washington company that makes transcripts of closed committee hearings in the House of Representatives, told undercover FBI agents posing as Soviet agents that he had delivered "sample pages" of secret material to the Russians, including one document classified as "top secret."

A former clerk in the FBI identification division, who, authorities say, has a record of cocaine and heroine abuse, Jeffries said he planned to sell a set of three documents to the Soviets for $5,000, as the first installment of planned monthly deliveries of classified material. He said the documents were part of a "full bag of top-secret and secret documents," verbatim transcripts of secret congressional hearings on military matters, prepared by the Acme Reporting Company, a stenographic firm where he worked.

According to court testimony by FBI agent Michael Giglia on Saturday, an Acme official told the FBI the company shreds copies of top-secret material by hand and places them in the trash can.

A 1982 federal directive requires federal and private agencies to shred, using government-approved machines, or to burn unneeded classified material.

Despite the recent epidemic of spy cases — there have been 11 so far in this "year of the spy" — experts say lax security measures and procedures still make it far too easy for high security risks like Jeffries to gain access to sensitive US documents.

A spokesman for Acme insists that a background investigation made when Jeffries joined the firm two months ago was "thorough." But the spokesman says the District of Columbia police check failed to show that Jeffries had been arrested for posession of heroin in 1983. An arrest on drug charges, he says, would "almost certainly" have been grounds for refusing employment.

Congressional procedures require security clearances for both staff and outside stenographers. But to ensure that copies of transcripts do not leave Capitol Hill, sources say it may be necessary to rely exclusively on congressional staff.

Sources in Congress add that the Jeffries case may speed the implementation of legislation passed earlier this year, calling for a comprehensive review of congressional security procedures.

The Jeffries case focuses attention on congressional security procedures just as the Reagan administation, reacting to the rash of recent spy cases, has invoked controversial new measures of its own to control sensitive executive-level information.

Two weeks ago, the administration announced that government employees with — or seeking — access to "sensitive compartmented information" could be required to take random lie-detector tests. The presidential directive could require Cabinet officials to submit to the tests.

But after a strong, public protest against the new policy was lodged last Thursday by Secretary of State George P. Shultz, the White House now says tests would be given only to officials actually suspected of espionage.

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